

1. The Introduced Species – Poppy in the Golden Triangle

The documentary movie "Lord of the Golden Triangle" directed by Kimia Zabihyan [perhaps 20-30 years ago], gives a telling account on Shan's case of poppy trade. We learn that poppy was introduced to Shan State by the British over 200 years ago. Half of the opium is purchased by USA. The explanation of the Shan army of freedom-fighters (or 'Shan rebels', ရှမ်းသူပုန်, as mentioned in a previous NewPilgrim) is that the opium is now the source of their economy for the army resources and weapons. Note that the Shan army is active in the civil war already over 40 years - the longest civil war in the world. After they'd gain freedom, they would completely stop all of the opium trade. The documentary movie features also a ten-year old boy who has been trained as a boy-soldier in the Shan freedom-fighters army for two years already. In the army, we learn, being caught smoking the opium is punished by death. The villagers who grow the opium however are smoking it.. The narrator also claims, that the Thai government allows the army leader Khun Sa to trade the opium through Thailand, and in exchange the Thais are allowed to smuggle Shan timber to Thailand.

First of six parts: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Mx0fQR_-Xs . (Follow to the other parts using the links suggested by Youtube.)

2. Eating One Meal a Day – And Fruit?

The Buddha recommended monks to eat one meal a day: "Bhikkhus, I partake a single meal for the day, and on account of it experience few afflictions, few ailments, lightness, power, and a pleasant abiding. Come! bhikkhus, you too partake a single meal for the day, and on account of it experience few afflictions, few ailments, lightness, power, and a pleasant abiding." (<http://www.budsas.org/ebud/majjhima/065-bhaddali-e1.htm>)

Well, a friend of mine suggested that those who eat one meal a day should not eat fruit after the meal – rather, they should eat it right before the meal ... "Hm, what a nonsense!" Thought I at the first moment. But it took me a number of months before I decided to research this issue once and for all.

An excellent website that debunks this idea part by part, giving detailed information and providing references is here - <https://akshatrathi.wordpress.com/2010/04/14/always-eat-fruits-before-a-meal-the-science-behind-false-claims/> . If you don't have much time to read all that, you may like to see some extracts from other websites. –

a) <http://www.healthxchange.com.sg/healthyliving/DietandNutrition/Pages/Should-Fruit-Be-Eaten-Before-or-After-Meals.aspx>

"Fact: Fruit can be eaten at any time and it can be eaten along with other foods. The body produces digestive enzymes for protein, fat, and carbohydrates which help it digest mixed meals. Besides, since the stomach has a high concentration of hydrochloric acid, bacteria is killed before it is able to reproduce so fermentation cannot take place in the stomach."

b) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/12/the-best-way-to-eat-fruit_n_2114888.html

"There is no need to eat any food or type of food on an empty stomach. This myth has been around for a long time. There is no science to support it even though proponents make scientific-sounding statements," Jill Weisenberger, MS, RD, CDE, author of *Diabetes Weight Loss -- Week by Week*

c) <http://healthyeating.sfgate.com/eating-fruit-after-meal-bad-you-10864.html>

"Some people falsely believe that eating fruit immediately after a meal can cause disease, according to the Chi Health and Workplace Wellness Solutions website. It's true that Ayurvedic principles of food combining suggest eating fruit alone rather than with a meal is for best digestion. But you can rest assured that eating fruit at any time during the day is a healthy choice that will increase your intake of key vitamins and minerals. However you eat fruit, you're doing a nutritious thing for your body."

There is also a plenty of websites that are persuading the reader to eat fruit on an empty stomach, minimum one hour before one's meal, and preferably at least two hours after. But those websites (that I have seen) give virtually no reference to support their bold statements.

<http://www.livestrong.com/article/466722-eating-fruit-before-meals/>

<http://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-4970/The-Major-Rule-for-Eating-Fruit.html>

<http://www.medimanage.com/my-diet/articles/facts-or-fiction-7-things-not-to-do-after-meals.aspx>

3. Making Buddha's Image – Prohibited?!

According to the documentary "Eurasia - Episode III - Gandhara The Renaissance of Buddhism" - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3bsxanBi_c , video time from 05:05 - in Ajaṇṭa, one of the oldest caves with Buddhist images (dating to ca. 200 BC) the Buddha is not depicted as a human, but as '*kālacakra*' (the Rebirth-Wheel). Also represented as lotus, horse without a rider, or a tree. In a nearby cave there are direct depictions of the Buddha dated three centuries later than the *kālacakra* frescos. The movie claims that the Buddha's wish was to never represent His image. There is a text in a Pāḷi Commentary which contains a portion that may substantiate that claim, namely the *Jātaka 479 – Kāḷiṅgabodhi Jātaka*. The image of Buddha is known in Pāḷi as *uddissaka cetiya* (literally "reference shrine"). The word '*avatthuka*' is the key – it either means "unsubstantial" or it means "improper", thus forming a controversy.

"*The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*," vol. 4, E.B. Cowell, tr. by W.H.D. Rouse, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, Chennai, 2006; p.142 :

"How many shrines are there?" – "Three, Ānanda." – "Which are they?" – "Shrines for a relic of the body [*sārīrikam*], a relic of use or wear [*paribhogikam*], a relic of memorial [*uddissakam*]." – "Can a shrine be made, Sir, during your life?" – "No, Ānanda, not a body-shrine; that kind is made when a Buddha enters Nirvāna. **A shrine of memorial is improper because the connection depends on the imagination only.** But the great bo-tree used by the Buddhas is fit for a shrine, be they alive or be they dead."

The portion concerned here in Pāḷi is "*uddissakam avatthukam mamāyanamattameva hoti.*" – "*Uddissaka is unsubstantial/improper, (valuable) only by the extent of being cherished.*" The Burmese translation (made for general public) misrepresents the Pāḷi by a simplified form, saying "*Paribhoga cetiya and uddissaka cetiya may be well worshipped ('carried out') even during the life of Buddhas.*"¹ The Sinhalese official translation of this passage merely translates the Pāḷi, exhibiting the Pāḷi's negative mood: "*Uddesika cetiya is non-substantial. (Void of substance.) It is only (valuable) by cherishing.*"²

Whether '*avatthuka*' means 'unsubstantial' or 'improper', that may be difficult to say. But what we may tell for certain that we have no images of the Buddha until a century or two before Christ.

In http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/budd/hd_budd.htm we may learn that "in the earliest Buddhist art of India, the Buddha was not represented in human form. His presence was indicated instead by a sign, such as a pair of footprints, an empty seat, or an empty space beneath a parasol.

In the first century A.D., the human image of one Buddha came to dominate the artistic scene, and one of the first sites at which this occurred was along India's northwestern frontier. In the area known as Gandhara, artistic elements from the Hellenistic world combined with the symbolism needed to express Indian Buddhism to create a unique style. Youthful Buddhas with hair arranged in wavy curls resemble Roman statues of Apollo; the monastic robe covering both shoulders if arranged in heavy classical folds, reminiscent of a Roman toga."

In "*The Buddha Image: Its Origin and Development*" by Yuvraj Krishan, p.51-52³ – we learn that the art of the today's Buddha images in *Theravāda* has its root in the former *Mahāyāna* depictions:

"The radical change in Buddhist art has been explained as an expression of the change in the doctrinal content of Buddhism. "In artistic expression," observes Wheeler, "the outstanding difference between these two main types of Buddhism (Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna) was that during the prevalence of the Hīnayāna teaching the Buddha himself was never represented. His presence was symbolized by a chair, a footprint, an umbrella, a riderless horse. About this symbol crowd the other participants in the scene, but there is no central commanding figure. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, on the other hand, the figure of the divine

¹ "ပရိဘောဂဓေတီ၊ ဥဒ္ဓိဿကဓေတီတို့ကိုကား ဘုရားတို့ ထင်ရှားရှိစဉ်ပင်လျှင် ပြုခြင်းငှာတတ်ကောင်း၏။"

² "Uddēsika caitya avastukaya. (Vastu rahitaya.) Mamāyanaya pamañinma vē."

³ https://books.google.com.mm/books?id=kDyJh--iaL0C&pg=PA51&lpg=PA51&dq=never+represent+Buddha%27s+image&source=bl&ots=IWKBaRzhuN&sig=eVLxUE4cAvRFHT1DXcL_TGdFHU0&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

Buddha controls the assembly and is the focus of its composition ... " He goes on to add, "Artistically, this change found its first full expression in what is now West Pakistan and Afghanistan ... "

Towards the close of the last century Foucher averred that responsibility for the entire development of Gandhara art belongs to the Mahāyāna School. Zimmer expressed identical views. "... when suddenly we find that the completely Extinguished One has become visible in the frame of the illusory world, rendered so by illusory means, a new fundamental teaching, or at least a new conception of the fundamental teaching must be sought ... And we know precisely what the new conception was: it was the Mahāyāna which is documented in the very period of the Gandhara monuments by the Prajñāpāramitā texts." So hallowed was the Buddha to the early Indians that he was represented only by symbols before the 1st or 2nd century AD. When the Buddha was first represented in anthropomorphic form at Gandhara, Western humanism clashed with Indian mysticism. "The Gandhara compositions," wrote Percy Brown, "mark the beginning of the movement, when the Hīnayāna or the primitive system of Buddhism was being superseded by the Mahāyāna or theistic system" The discovery of sculptures of bodhisattvas seems to reinforce this view of the Mahāyānist origin of Gandharan art. "The bodhisattvas ... belong only to the northern or Mahāyāna schools. Except Maitreya, they are unknown in Ceylon, Siam and Burma." "In the representation of bodhisattvas" observed Vogel, "we find in the Graeco-Buddhist art the beginning of the Mahāyāna."

Despite all of this information, we find an old *sutta*, a Buddha's discourse in Rakhine State (of western Myanmar), where the Buddha Himself extols the merit of making an image of Him. The image is to be made during the Buddha's life. The discourse is called *Satthubimba Sutta*. I have worked on its translation from Pāli together with ven. Ashon Ñāṇuttara, who needed it for his PhD thesis. You may read it here:

<https://archive.org/details/TranslationOfSatthubimbaSutta> .

4. So How Many Perfections Are There?

In the documentary "Eurasia - Episode III - Gandhara The Renaissance of Buddhism" -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3bsxanBi_c , video time from 14:46, we learn that the oldest evidence of *Pāramī* from some of the oldest fragments of Buddhist scripture are "six virtues of Gandhara's oldest manuscripts: "(1) giving (including one's life), (2) living according to morality, (3) patience and humility, (4) energy and tenacity, (5) meditation, and (6) intuitive understanding of oneself and the universe. The first four virtues existed from the very start of Buddhism. The fifth and sixth virtues appeared afterwards. ..."

The narrator in the documentary doesn't provide us with any reference to substantiate that "first four virtues existed from the very start of Buddhism." There are ten *Pāramīs* in today's Theravāda school of Buddhism (excepting meditation from the above six, and adding renunciation, truth/integrity, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity), and six in Mahāyāna. The six mentioned above are identical with those of Mahāyāna today. For more information about Mahāyāna and Theravāda Perfections, see the relevant site of Wikipedia - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C4%81ramit%C4%81> . An exquisite account on perfections in contemporary Theravāda is written by ven. Rerukane Chandavimala Mahathera – "Analysis of Perfections", which is however just a shortened (abridged) translation of his original Sinhalese "*Pāramitā Prakaraṇaya*". It may be purchased here - https://store.pariyatti.org/Analysis-of-Perfections_p_1496.html .

5. Erythema Ab Igne – The Laptop Disease

Staying in Myanmar, travelling by buses or cars – who wouldn't keep his 'laptop' on the top of their lap? But the wise one will not act too quickly. I've travelled just a few days by car to visit museum – only once a week, keeping the laptop on my lap while on the car. Then my left thigh started to be numb and prickly. This is called "erythema ab igne", as I learn from <https://thebottomline.as.ucsb.edu/2011/02/taking-the-lap-out-of-laptop> . This didn't happen to me with laptops before, because I always kept a laptop cooler underneath. Fortunately, the discomfort at my thigh is just temporary and will heal itself within a few months .. at least according to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erythema_ab_igne :-). Laptop coolers are easy to get in Yangon's supermarkets, and a 'better' one won't amount to more than \$10 . But if you don't want a cooler, you can use a large book and the problem is (maybe) solved too. Nevertheless, the problem should not be underestimated. I remember that when I was in Sri Lanka, I heard of a Burmese monk who developed this disease to a very unpleasant stage, at which he had to undergo operation in the hospital. The Wikipedia page cites a dermatologist site of New Zealand, suggesting that this disease may develop into skin-cancer:

"If there is a persistent sore that does not heal or a growing lump within the rash, a skin biopsy should be performed to rule out the possibility of skin cancer. If the erythema ab igne lesions demonstrate pre-cancerous changes, the use of 5-fluorouracil cream has been recommended. Abnormally pigmented skin may persist for years. Treatment with topical tretinoin or laser may improve the appearance."

(<http://www.dermnetnz.org/vascular/erythema-ab-igne.html>)

This disease is however not to be confused with Meralgia Paraesthetica - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meralgia_paraesthetica - which is caused by obesity or tightening the femoral muscle, e.g. by tight pants.

6. IQ: Augment by Meditation, Degenerate by Phone

Intelligence can be increased by solving problems and meditation. Meditation's effect on brain has been much documented - you may see a detailed lecture on the scientific research of meditative monks' brains and the experiments with beginner-yogi's brain development - <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v844799YK3aFYQj> .

Today phones are very common and many people spend very long time on their phones. This may have adverse effect on their intelligence, especially of children, who are much more susceptible to the phone radiation: http://bebrainfit.com/cell-phone-radiation-brain/?awt_l=nnNN46&awt_m=3bk_BxvFWfVRVbr . Interestingly, while Apple's iPhone 6 has 1.14 SAR (Specific Absorption Rate), it is undefeatably incomparable to Samsung Galaxy Note, which has just 0.19 SAR. Samsung Galaxy Note is thus one of the most human-friendly phones in the world. See more phones & SAR here: <http://cellphones.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=003054> .

May all beings be happy,

monk Sarana